

the cold in my bones by pureO

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Summary: Nancy starts to realize that she might have more than just friendly feelings for her monster hunting partner, Jonathan. I'm just testing the waters, this is my first fic for a ship, I usually write oc's so be kind on me please. So this will be eventual Jancy but the other characters will be there as well, and probably there's gonna be Joyce/Hopper stuff too.

1. Chapter 1

The fall was long and cold, and now the winter days dragged on.

What had once been Nancy's favorite season of the year, now was an arid wasteland, corrupted by the memories of the recent events.

This was Hawkins coldest winter in years, and even though things were starting to fall back into normalcy, she couldn't stop thinking that something was still off.

Maybe it was the never-ending string of nightmares that haunted her at night, or the persistent absence of her best friend. Or the fact that her brother spent most of his time in the basement, staring at the blanket fort he once built for his telekinetic friend.

Maybe it was the cold, humid and relentless, a cold that stuck to her bones and lingered in them long after he was inside her house. A cold that reminded her a bit too much of the one she felt when she was in the upside down.

Maybe it was the fact that the only source of solace she could think of came from none other than the least expected person. Jonathan Byers.

Well maybe not that unexpected. After all, hunting a faceless monster with someone else is a bond that can't be easily destroyed. And then there was Steve. Her loving boyfriend, that had redeemed himself and now was even dreamier than before.

But still, something was missing.

It was Christmas Eve, she reckons, when she finally realized. She'd probably known for longer than that, but that was the first pinch. She'd given him the camera, as a Christmas gift.

She could still remember the moment, second by second, playing in slow motion in her head.

He wore a red flannel shirt and that blue jacket he always wore. His golden brown hair was disheveled and it made him the more

endearing.

He smiled as he asked his little brother about the d&d game he had just played, and for a moment, the cold in Nancy's bones was replaced by something else, something warm and fuzzy that encompassed her, head to toe.

Maybe they could all get a fresh start after all, maybe even though Barb didn't made it back, it meant so much that Will did. And that Jonathan, that sullen kid that never had many friends, didn't lose one of the most important people in his life. She felt grateful for that. So she called out for him

"Hey Jonathan... Wait up"

He turned and looked at her as she walked down the stairs, a bit nervous, but with a warm smile on his lips, as he always had for her.

"Merry Christmas" She said, handing him the wrapped package, a wide smile on her face now too. She can feel the warmth inside her growing by the second, and all she can think of is how much they had been through together, and how no matter what happens next, they are friends, no; even more than that.

War buddies, sharing all the weight of each other's pain.

He takes the gift from her hands gently and he musters softly

"Thanks - umm I didn't get you anything"-he smiled, a bit embarrassed, a bit surprised, showed by the slight red that invades his ears... truth is, no one has ever given him a present other than his mother. But he continues -"I feel bad"

Apparently the nervousness is contagious because after his words, she smiles awkwardly -"No, no, it's not really a present... is ..mhh .. well, you'll see"

she laughs faintly and Jonathan can't seem to remember ever seeing her looking that pretty and radiant, in that yellow sweater, pink cheeks and brown hair falling down her shoulders.

But before he can think of something clever to say or anything at all, she leans into him, and kisses him in the cheek. And now he feels the

warmth that runs through Nancy's veins, and it fills him with hope.

She didn't even know where that came from. She only knew that she needed a bit more, more than a hug, more than a smile. She needed something more intimate, but something that didn't break any boundaries. She needed him to know he was appreciated, maybe a bit too much.

He smells like cinnamon and pine trees, just like that fateful night, and his skin is soft beneath her lips.

His lips curl up into that crooked smile she has come to know so well, and he whispers one last "Merry Christmas" before he leaves.

Nancy goes back to her spot on the couch next to Steve, and as he puts his arm around her, he asks with a smile "Did you give it to him?"

"Yeah" she responds, her thoughts lost somewhere else. She can't understand why, but suddenly Steve's arm around her doesn't feel as right as it should.

All she can think of is the guy that saved her from the upside down, and how he's probably the only one who can truly understand her. And how his smell stays with her long after he's walked out of the door.

2. Chapter 2

It's been two weeks since she gave him the camera. She hasn't seen him since, other than the two times he came by to pick up Will. It's for the best, maybe.

Because she tries, she tries so hard. She craves her old life, she begs for her life back, the way it was before November. But it still haunts her. It started with the nightmares, and not one day has passed where she didn't fell asleep only to find no rest at all.

But this night, this night it had been especially tortuous.

She walked the woods, at dusk. She couldn't tell if it was snow or it was dust, but tiny flakes fell and seemed to stay suspended in the air nearby.

She felt lost, and scared. But she knew she had to keep going, had to keep looking. The woods, denser with every step she took. The gun in her hand was cold and heavy, but not nearly as much as her heart felt, heavier and heavier.

The last of the sunlight was dying, and she wanted out before the darkness engulfed her, but she couldn't get out. Primal fear mixed with some old nostalgia, older than life itself, kept her from running wild to the edge of the forest.

And then she heard it. Gargling noises, like the ones beasts make as they eat their prey. She runs, runs to find the sound. She doesn't know why, because it terrifies her the thought of what she may find but she has to.

A shadow, darker than the night, crouches in the floor, devouring something that lies in the ground, and suddenly she remembers... the deer... she sneaks behind the creature, gun in hand, ready to face whatever comes.

In the blink of an eye, she goes from terrified to complete and abject pain. The monster is feasting indeed, but it's not the deer, and Nancy begins to comprehend. There, lying in the ground is what remains of her best friend, Barb, rotten and covered in slime.

Nancy screams, she screams as hard as she can, with all the air in her lungs but no sounds come out. Now the faceless monster is watching her, with it's rows of teeth staring at her, and a gut-wrenching noise comes out of the whole from where it feeds. She fires the gun, once, twice, three times, as many as she can until she's out of bullets, but nothing changes.

Then she runs, to the void, because the night has become insurmountably black, and she can't see where she's going, she can only feel the putrid breath of the monster catching up to her, breathing down her neck. And then she hears a far scream, "Nancy! Nancy, where are you!?"

She keeps running, and all of a sudden she screams back and it finally something comes out of her mouth "Jonathan! Jonathan I'm right here"

His response comes clearer this time "Nancy! Follow my voice!"

And she does, for every time he yells her name, the night seems a little less dark. Finally she sees it, the trunk. It's lit up by a red glow, and he can hear Jonathan's voice almost next to her. "I got you Nancy. I got you" she throws herself to the ground and crawls into the tree, just a second before the monster gets to her. She feels his hand on hers, and she can only keep screaming "Jonathan!"

But there's no need to worry cause a few seconds later she is in his arms, and she knows she's safe. Safe with him, and she hears the only words that can calm her down, softly whispered by Jonathan – "I've got you"

She wakes up abruptly, covered in cold sweat and hands clenched tightly into the woolen sweater he had forgotten that night in her room. It still smelled a bit like him, and it had come to be kind of a security blanket for her.

But tonight she needed more than that, because the nightmare had been particularly gruesome. The clock in the nightstand marked the hour as 2:45 am. She had to talk to someone. But whom could she really talk to? There was not many people who could understand her... she had talked to Mike sometimes, but it was a school night, and she didn't want to wake his little brother up just because she had a nightmare.

How ridiculous would that be? Nancy wheeler scared to death of the

darkness of her own room, waking up her parents. No, that wasn't an option.

"Steve" she whispered to herself. She dialed the phone, doubtful, but desperate. It was her last resort.

"Hello?" a sleepy whisper answered her call. She couldn't understand how could Steve sleep so much after what they had been through. On the other hand, she was glad that he could forget. She wouldn't wish her own fate on anyone.

"Hi Steve"

"Nance? What's up?" A faint yawn on the other side of the line

"Nothing. Just couldn't sleep. Sorry to wake you. It was stupid to call"

"Hey, Nancy, it's ok" he still sounds half asleep, but at least he's trying. She knows he tries-"Nightmares again?"

"Yes. It was horrible. Like reliving that day, in the woods." She's on the verge of tears, but tries as hard as she can to conceal it

"It's horrible. But it was just a dream Nance. Try to go back to sleep. Just think of something else"

"I wish I could, But it's just that every time I close my eyes, I see it."

"It's gone babe. I swear. You're safe now. We're safe"

She wants to retort to him that he doesn't know that. That they can't be sure, that she has this feeling growing inside her that things can come crumbling down again at any second, that the impending doom is closing in on them again, like the calm before the storm.

But she knows is no use. Her boyfriend is half asleep and as much as it pains her, he wouldn't understand. He'd think that she was being paranoid. And maybe she was. But right now, she needed comfort, maybe some validation. And as much as Steve tried, he couldn't understand.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm sorry. You're right it was just a dream. I don't know

what I was thinking. Go back to sleep, I'll see you tomorrow at school."

"You sure? I'm fine if you want to keep talking." His offer is sincere, but she knows he must be real tired.

"No, no, don't worry. I'm fine. And hey thanks for listening."

"Anything for you Nance. Sweet dreams"

Click.

Nancy tried to sleep, but there was something that haunted her. She gave up after a good 20 minutes, when she realized she couldn't even bring herself to turn off the lights again. The room was colder, and she was now wearing Jonathan's sweater on top of her shirt. It was strangely soothing. And she knew then, what she had to do.

It wasn't hard to sneak out of the window; she had done it countless time before to go see Steve. She climbed down, with cat like movements, and into the car.

She turned on the radio, and drove straight to the Byers house.

A couple of blocks before, she started questioning her own judgment. What the hell was she thinking? Jonathan was probably sleeping, and even if he wasn't, she couldn't just come knocking on the door. She'd wake up the whole house, and the least thing she wanted was to cause more trouble for Jonathan and his family.

But before she knew, she was almost in front of the Byers house. To her surprise, lights were still on, and there was someone sitting in a chair on the porch.

With a deep breath, she got out of the car.

"Nancy Wheeler? What the hell are you doing here at this hour young lady? Does your family know you're out?"

'Shit', Nancy thought. It was chief Hopper standing on the porch of the house.

"Is everyone ok? Why are you here chief?" He wasn't wearing his uniform, and it dawned on Nancy what he was doing there. Well, it was kind of sweet after all, the thought of Joyce and Hopper.

"Hey. I do the questions here. For god sakes Nancy, haven't we gone through enough? Do you know how dangerous is to be out at this hour?"

"Sorry Hopper... I mean, chief. It's just... well I ... kind of have this... well uhhh... shit... I don't know. I just wanted to talk to Jonathan. If that's ok"

He scoffed, unsatisfied by her answer, but begrudgingly accepted.

"Fine. But let's make this the last time. If I catch you sneaking out of your house again this hour, I'll tell your parents"

"Thanks chief." She smiled playfully

"You're lucky. He can't sleep either. So we were out here getting some air. He went in for some coffee" Hopper's idea of 'fresh air' was a half finished beer and a cigarette.

But Nancy didn't mind. Whatever helps you sleep at night, she thought.

Hopper put out his cigarette and went into the house, speaking softly "someone's here for you kid... don't stay too late"

Jonathan frowned in perplexity for a second, and Nancy could see him through the window.

A second later, he came out the door, and he seemed even more confused by the sight of the girl, wrapped up in his sweater and her characteristic bright red jacket.

"Nancy? What are you doing here? Are you ok?"

"Yeah, I just.. I couldn't..."

"Sleep?" he finished for her

"Yes. It's the nightmares. I can't handle them. I feel like I'm going to explode. Every night. I don't know what's worse. Being awake and remember what happened, all the time, or sleeping and seeing it in my dreams. I don't think I've had a good night's sleep in months. I just... I can't anymore..."

Nancy crumbled under the weight of her pain, and the tears came running down her cheeks. She advanced to him and buried her head on the crook of his neck, grabbing him with both hands by his shirt, feeling his warmth under his thick jacket.

He stayed still for a couple of seconds, puzzled, but he finally placed his arms around her, and rested his head on the top of hers. Her hair was soft, and her presence both comforting and warm.

She felt his breath on the top of her head, and felt finally safe.

They stood there, like that for a couple of minutes, and even though neither truly wanted to let go, Jonathan spoke first, stepping away from the embrace just enough so he could see her in the eyes.

"Hey, want to come in? We're going to freeze out here" he offered with a soft laugh.

"Yeah. Sure" she answered, still wiping tears from her eyes, but smiling to him.

They went in, and she told him about her nightmare. How on the bad days, she still couldn't tell what was real and what not. How she jumps at loud noises, or how she loses her breath at shadows in the dark.

And after she's done pouring her heart out, she whispers "I'm sorry I came by so late. But I needed someone to talk to. Someone who understands"

She sits next to him, close enough that their legs almost touch, but she keeps her hands in her knees, in fists that sweat, not sure if from the rush of finally letting everything out in the open, or from the nearness of the boy that smells like cinnamon and pine trees.

"I know what you mean," He says after a short pause "I still have

nightmares too.

And sometimes, when I am here alone at night, when Will is still over at your place and mom has a late shift, I feel weird being here, in the same place where it happened. It feels like... something lingers, you know? In the hallways, in the lights... like... we're not completely ..."

"Safe?" she finished for him this time around.

"Yeah, as if there was something unfinished, you know? Too many loose ends... Eleven... Barb... the lab people ...I don't know."

She was amazed at how he could put to words the exact things she was feeling, almost like he could read her mind, and strangely enough, that felt better than anything else, because it made her feel not so alone anymore.

"That's the feeling" -she sighed in relief- "The one no one else gets. Well maybe Mike and Will. But they're so young. They are more resilient I hope"

Jonathan bit his lip and his brow furrowed. His eyes darted across the room, like he was making sure no one else was listening, and then he whispered

"I worry about Will. I really do."

She could see the worry in his eyes, and she asked -"Why? Is he ok?"

"Yeah.. I mean... He seems to be... but... something weird happened the other day..."

"What?" her big blue eyes glistened with curiosity, and she leaned even more into him.

"Ok so ever since he got back from the ...upside down... He's got this cough, like real bad. The doctors said it was because of the exposure to toxic air. It's supposed to get better. Only it isn't getting better. So yesterday, I heard him in the bathroom. He was having a bad fit of cough. But when he came out he said he was fine. Either way, I went in to wash my hands for dinner and the sink was clogged. And when I was unclogging it... well, I found something."

"What? What did you find?"

"I'll show you"

Jonathan stood up and went to his bedroom. He came out seconds later with a jar in his hands.

"I found this"

Nancy took the jar in her hands, and she saw a disgusting little animal inside. It seemed so familiar and yet, she couldn't name it, like a *déjà vu*. It looked like the mixture of a leech, a worm and a slug.

"What is that? Where did it come from... you don't think ..." She asked, not sure if she wanted to know the answer

"I don't know what to think. But I guess Will hasn't told anyone because he doesn't want to worry mom. I told Hopper, but he doesn't want to say anything until we know what this is. Or where it came from. There were more, but we burnt them. We're supposed to take this one to a lab where he's got a contact. He's been ok you know? I'm not sure what's happening with him and mom, but it's good for her. And he helps around the house"

"Yes. He's a nice guy. I'm happy for your mom"

And then it hit her. If Joyce Byers could still find happiness in the world after what she had been through, so could she. And throwing caution to the wind, she rested her head on Jonathan's shoulder, holding his hand on hers, as a plan begins to form in her mind

"I'll go with you" she said "To the lab. And we'll research, we'll get to the bottom of this"

"You don't have to. Really don't" His hand squeezed hers, as if he feared to let go

"I want to help. I want to help finish this, once and for all. I want to feel safe again. Besides, I kind of need your help too, so we'll help each other. Like a team."

He smirked lightly "Nancy wheeler... wants to go monster hunting

again huh?"

And, smiling honestly for the first time in what felt like ages, she uttered-"yes"

3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3: Disorder

They sat in silence for a while, but as far as Nancy was concerned, it wasn't awkward. She just felt happy to be in the company of someone with whom she didn't feel the need to fill the gaps in conversation.

Their hands remained intertwined, and she wondered if that made it all weird. Truth is, she didn't really wanted to let go, or to move away. It was exhilarating, the feeling of his touch. And even she couldn't understand why.

All she knew was that the weight of the world seemed a lot more bearable around him.

Next day was especially cold, and even though she hadn't had much sleep the day before, she felt a bit better. Knowing she would see Jonathan soon gave her some peace of mind. So much so that she forgot for a second about Steve, who was already waiting for her at the front of the school

"Hi. How was your night? You get some sleep?"

"Yes" she answered. Failing to mention it had been resting her head on Jonathan Byers's shoulders. A pang of guilt hit her in the stomach but she didn't regret it.

"Ok so... let's walk to class. If I'm late one more time, I get detention"

"You know what Steve? I just remembered I have to go to the library. I'll catch you at lunch ok?"

"Are you ok Nance? You seem a bit distracted"

"Yes, I'm fine- she smiled- I swear, I just have to go get a book. Go or you'll be late"

She waited a couple more minutes, hoping maybe she would catch Jonathan coming in, but he never made it. Maybe he'd skipped first period, she thought.

Nancy wanted so badly to talk to him. To start planning their next step, and to finally reveal what she wanted. What she needed, to find a little bit of peace, to have closure.

She needed to find Barb.

Classes went by glacially slow, and as soon as the lunch bell rang, she sprung out of her sit, and went straight to the dark room, where Jonathan spent most of his lunch hours.

As predicted, he was there, so focused in his work that he never even felt Nancy came in.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and it startled him so much he almost dropped the tray where he was developing the photographs.

"I'm sorry" Nancy said waving her hands- " I didn't mean to startle you"

He smirked, slightly out of breath.

"It's fine. You shouldn't sneak up on people like that" He was just very happy the red light in the room made it impossible for her to see the blush in his cheeks.

"It's just that you were so focused. I didn't want to interrupt."

"You're not interrupting at all"-there was that smile again. Comforting, familiar. "What's up?"

"Well, for starters... we should start by trying to figure what that thing you found was. And second of all..."

She remained quiet for a bit. What she wanted to say next was a bit tricky, to say the least.

"And second of all...?" He urged her, intrigued.

"So remember what we talked about yesterday?"

"Yes. You wanted help with something right? What is it?"

"I want to find Barb"

He went silent for a moment, baffled

"Barb? What do you mean? Eleven found her remember? She was in the upside down. Besides...why? It wouldn't be her anymore."

"Because I hate all of this. I hate that her parents are still looking for her. That half the town thinks she ran away. The look of sadness and hope her parents give me when I run into them. I want to give them closure, otherwise they'll spend the rest of their lives searching for someone that's gone"

"But even if we could go back there, which I don't know if it's even possible..."

"Yeah, I know. I know. And it's awful. But I don't know what else to do."

He sighed. The only thing more unfeasible than saying yes, was saying no to Nancy wheeler.

"Ok. Let's try it"

"Thank you" She said, and gave him a quick hug before running out of the room "I'll meet you by your car after school"

He laughed to himself, and wondered how had this girl managed to get inside his head so much in so little time.

Steve caught her leaving the dark room

"I thought we were having lunch together"

-*Shit*- she thought to herself. She had been in such a hurry to find Jonathan that she had forgotten about lunch with Steve

"I'm so sorry, I totally spaced out. I just needed to talk to Jonathan for a bit."

"Nancy is something going on? You've been so distant lately... Is it something I did? Please, don't shut me out. Tell me what's going on"

"It's nothing Steve, it's just ... I don't know. I haven't been feeling like myself. It's like I've changed."

"If there's anything I can do... Just say the word"

She was never going to have a chance again. Not like this one. And it broke her heart, because she had grown to care for the boy in front of her. He had proven to her that despite his mistakes, he was a good person. But she couldn't keep lying to herself anymore. Her feelings had changed, and maybe it was just a phase, maybe she'd come to regret this. But it was all she could do to be honest to him. He owed him that much

"Steve... maybe we should talk"

"You're breaking up with me" There was not an inch of doubt on his statement. He lowered his gaze and held her hand- "Was it something I did? Can I fix this?"

"It's nothing you did. You have been amazing. I care for you. But there are things I'm going through, things no one can understand. And I absolutely love you for trying, as I know you do. But it's impossible."

"And Byers can, right?" His voice wasn't cruel or angry. It was just a sad resignation.

Her eyes were filling with tears, and she just nodded. "I'm so sorry"

"Don't be sorry Nancy Wheeler." He tried to hide the pain in his voice unsuccessfully "It has been an honor knowing you." His hand still held hers and with a kiss on her forehead, he whispered,

"You better tell Byers to be nice to you, or I'll beat his ass"

She laughed softly beneath her tears "You are an idiot, Steve Harrington"

"For you, always" he said as he walked away, a smile escaping his lips, but not his eyes.

As Steve walked away, Nancy felt a bit of guilt, but most of all, she

felt a weight off her shoulders.

As much as she cared for Steve, she couldn't keep lying to him, because no matter how much she tried to hide it, in the middle of all this confusion and fear and pain, the only thing that made her feel warm and almost normal, was the presence of Jonathan Byers. She didn't know what that meant, if anything at all. But it was clearly not going anywhere soon.

So she walked to her next class, with her heart a bit lighter, thinking of what it had felt to hold Jonathan's hand in hers.

4. Chapter 4

She is already waiting for him by his car when he gets to the parking lot. The crisp air cuts into her skin like knives, making her shiver underneath her red jacket and pink mittens.

"It's really freezing today huh" He says. Truth is, Nancy Wheeler still makes him incredibly nervous, almost as if she took all the words out of his mouth, shutting down his brain.

"Yeah. I think it might snow later"

She stands there, waiting for him to make a move, but he just stands in front of her, glued to the concrete floor

"Uhhmm... could you..." she mutters, pointing at the car door, throwing him a slight smile

"Oh of course, I'm sorry" He whispers back, opening the car for her. So dumb, he thinks...

She just snickers softly and mumbles a "thank you" his way

"So where to?" he asks once they are both in the car, the heat blasting to the maximum and the stereo humming in the background.

"Well, let's go to your place. Get that thing in the jar, you know, the slug. And we'll take it somewhere. See if we can figure what it is"

"Ok."

They drive in silence for a bit. Nancy wonders as to how wise could it be to tell the boy next to her about the occurrences of the day.

And every minute that passes feels like the silence is about to crush her, she needs to tell him. Why? She doesn't know. Or maybe she is afraid. Afraid because she knows, deep down, exactly why.

It has been so sudden, the change from friendship to something else.

From shared trauma to something warmer, better.

And there, in the seat next to him, looking at him, at his golden brown hair shining in the afternoon sun, at his half-crooked smile when she turns to look at him, at his voice that mumbles the lyrics to some joy division song, she can't, she won't hold it in any longer

"Steve and I broke up this morning"

His relaxed expression changes for a bit, and she can't really tell if it is one of relief or disappointment, or maybe a bit of both.

"I'm so sorry Nancy. Are you ok?"

He sounds genuinely sorry, maybe a bit too much for her liking. But words keep coming out of her mouth

"Don't be. I... I broke up with him" Her gaze drops and she starts fiddling with her own fingers.

Now that she has uttered the words, she feels stupid. Why did she had to go telling Jonathan that? He probably doesn't care. He is probably just being polite. He probably feels nothing more than the sympathy you feel for a sister or a dear friend. For someone you share a secret with. But no... there is more than that, she is almost sure.

She knows, it was there, in the lingering of his fingers on hers when they had cut their hands to attract the monster, in the longing stare on Christmas night, in the way he'd smelled her hair while he held her the night before. There had to be more

He doesn't respond right away. He's thinking, Nancy broke up with Steve... he doesn't know what to feel. He likes her. At least he thinks so... he should be happy, and he is, a little. But he's also confused.

"Why? I don't mean to pry... but I just thought... you guys were happy. It's ok if you don't want to tell me."

"No, it's fine. I think we've crossed the line where we couldn't talk about things. I mean we did almost died together." She waits a second, thinking carefully of her next words "I just ... I don't know. Ever since what happened... happened... I changed. Something inside me changed, and I think even though it has been completely

exhausting, heartbreaking, and painful... I can't go back to whom I was. The things I cared about, the stuff that seemed important... it's just not anymore. Steve wants so bad to forget everything that we went through, and I understand why. But I can't forget, and I don't want to. I'm glad he can, but I ..."

"Can't go back." He finishes. She isn't sure if she hates or loves the way he can read into her mind.

"Exactly"

"I suppose it's not all bad. I mean... you know what they say... If it doesn't kill you..."

"We are." She answers, no hesitation. "We are stronger" that's what she wants to believe. She truly does.

The determination in her voice reassures him, and the confusion fades away, leaving just a pleasant sensation inside him.

He smiles openly to her, and says, "Yes. We are"

She feels a rush, a tingling in her stomach. And for once, she believes that maybe things are not so bad.

It doesn't take them much longer to get to the Byers house, and as they're coming in the front door, they know something's gone wrong. The whole house is upside down, drawers' open, things smashed and out of place, ransacked

Jonathan rushes to the bedrooms, terrified of what he might find, but he finds nothing but more mess.

Nancy follows close behind, and watches as he paces around the house, rubbing his hand over his hair, murmuring constantly "What the hell"

"Is your mom at work? I mean...it wasn't her right?"

"No, she has a late shift tonight. And Will is over at your house right?"

He says pleadingly

"Yes. The were all excited for a new D&D campaign they were starting today, don't worry"

"Hopper?" he ponders suspiciously

"Call him"

When Jonathan gets off the phone he has a stern look in his eyes

"He said not to move" he informs her "He'll be here right away. Hey Nancy, if you want to go home, that's fine. You don't have to deal with this"

"I'm not leaving you alone." She thinks that he'll fight her on it, but instead, he just sits on the floor, hands on his knees, his mind going a million miles per hour.

Then he voices-"You know what the weirdest part is? They didn't take anything. Not that there's anything to take anyway. But you know. The stereo... the tv..."

"Maybe it was a prank. You know people can be assholes" she ventures, but she doesn't believe it herself. She just wants desperately to give him some peace of mind

"Yeah, maybe" He answers, but his thoughts seem to be further away

A loud knock on the door startles both teenagers, who jump out the couch and to the door.

It's the chief, and he looks just as concerned as Jonathan. He entered the house, inspecting every millimeter and not saying a word.

Finally, the three of them manage to put back together what they can and sit still in the sofa

"You know anybody who might have a problem you guys?" Hopper asks Jonathan.

"Well, people are not too fond of me in school. I mean they call me

weirdo and stuff. But no one has ever bothered to actually harass me, at least not at home. And my mom has no problem with anyone. I mean, since the whole thing with Will happened, people have been nicer, if anything"

"You think it has to do with ... you know... the whole thing?" Nancy asks, afraid of the answer.

And then it strikes her. She springs out of the sofa and into Jonathan's room. Hopper and Jonathan follow her

"This is where you kept the thing right?"- She says pointing at the now empty spot in the wooden shelf that hangs on his wall where the crystal jar used to be.

"Yeah..." in the rush of everything, he hadn't even thought of that

"Well somebody knew what we had planned. And they didn't want us to know"

"You told her?" Hopper says, rising his voice at Jonathan

"She deserved to know." He stares at the older man unapologetically

"You're putting her in danger. You shouldn't have done that."

"I can help" Nancy replies, fire in her eyes

"I don't want you kids involved in this no more. Take her home. I'll talk to your mom and wait here until she gets home, make sure she's all right."

She wants to reply something snarky back at Hopper, but when she goes to open her mouth she feels a hand in hers, a hand that bares the same scar she does, and that fits into it like an extension of her own arm.

She let's Jonathan lead her to the door and into the car, because her mind is now in a haze, torn between what she suspects and the electrifying feeling of his hand on hers.

They sit on the car, silent, their hands no longer tangled together

He wants to reach for her again, but he's lacking the nerve now that they're out of the house, and once more in the cold air. It's almost dark outside and snowflakes fall slowly, covering the windshield

"I need to know" She mumbles, her voice barely audible over the whistling of the wind that filters through the moldings of the vehicle
"I have to know what's going on"

"Why? It's over for you Nance" He musters the nickname and it has a nice ring coming from his lips, even though his voice comes out with a hint of frustration. "You don't have to be around this anymore. You're free. Go be free. You escaped, you made it, and you deserve your life back. Be with Steve, worry about the silly things. This isn't your battle anymore"

This is the part that confuses him, why does she stick around? Hasn't she had enough of this stuff for a lifetime? Because he's had it, but it somehow keeps haunting him

But Nancy is unfazed by his seeming exasperation and her answer comes clear

"It will always be my battle. And I will always lose. Barb is gone because of me, and I can't bring her back. Not alive anyway. So can you stop being a pretentious ass and let me help?"

He does understand that much. Maybe he's just not used to people not wanting to leave him

So he sighs "You have to forgive yourself, what happened that night... it's not your fault. You can't control what happens to people"

"But I can control what I do next. I can make a difference. I can help you, and Will and your mom, I want to be the person Barb knew I could be."

"What, like is a debt you have to pay? You don't owe me anything Nancy"

"I owe it to myself. Because I am not just another suburban girl who thinks she's rebelling by doing exactly what every other suburban girl does."

He covers his face in shame, and speaks softly "You're not. I am so sorry I said that, because you're not, so ..."

Before he finishes she interjects, speaking with an emotion he'd never seen before, bringing tears to her eyes

"I owe you because you make me feel alive, and confused and safe and scared and a million things I thought I'd never feel, that I didn't even know I could feel! Don't you get it by now? That I'm never more myself than when I am around you?"

It was now Nancy reading his mind, mirroring his feelings for her. He debates for a second, and then he decides. It's now or never Byers, do or die, he thinks to himself... so he goes for it.

He wipes the tear from her eye, stroking her cheek with his thumb, feeling her soft skin under his fingers, closing the distance between them, her eyes, bluer than ever from the tears, gazing into his, not giving in or looking away.

And then Nancy leans into him, feeling the electricity running wild through her, drowning her and sending chills down her spine, his brown eyes glowing in front of her, his scent inebriating.

Just as she feels the touch of his lips on hers she knows she's lost. That they need each other and that there's no other way this could have gone down, that if there were any doubts, they're gone now.

They kiss, slow at first, and it's all she can think about how he tastes sweeter than anything she's ever tasted.

He gets lost in the moment, and finally gives himself permission to want what he's wanted since the night she went to the upside down.

Like a mutual agreement, they both give themselves permission to want the other, like they have, in secret, for a long time.

So their kiss becomes faster, more passionate; with a longing they only knew in their imagination before now.

But suddenly, a loud thump on the window makes them jump once again, on the edge of their seats; and they see an annoyed Hopper

tapping the window with a flashlight

"Hey! What's the hold up? I told you to drive her home Jonathan!"

He lowers the window, and his bright red face greets the frown in the chief's face, and the freezing air.

"We're going! Jeez Hopper"

The cold breeze hits them like a brick and they both try to keep a straight face as Jonathan gets the car moving in the snow storm, but as soon as they are out of Hopper's cold stare, they gaze at each other and blurt out in chuckles.

Nancy smiles, a gesture he returns widely and she scoots over the sit so her arm is grazing his and her head rests on his shoulder. Then she asks, her heart fluttering and her voice lighter than the wind

"And now what?"

"Now" he answers, "Now I'll help you find Barb. And you'll help me with Will. Now we're a team"

He squeezes her hand in his, not ever wanting to let go.